



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

1230 YORK AVENUE

NEW YORK, NY 10021

June 27, 1979

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Jewel Plummer Cobb  
Dean  
Douglass College  
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903

Dear Dr. Cobb:

I was delighted to get your letter of June 15th asking whether I would comment on the qualifications of Dr. Evelyn Witkin for an endowed chair. This is a very happy task; for Dr. Witkin is undoubtedly superbly qualified and my comment about her is informed by an association that has spanned more than 35 years.

As a graduate student at Columbia I knew her as one of the brave pioneers who made an early commitment to the development of bacteria as objects of genetic research. Her dedication to this proceeded my own and was a substantial inspiration to my personal introduction to that branch of research.

She has devoted her entire career to the relentless pursuit of a single all important topic: the mechanism of damage to biological systems by radiation and the mechanisms by which this is repaired through the metabolic activity of the injured cells.

Applied to bacteria this may seem to be an arcane subject; but as the years have rolled by it has become one of intense public interest and policy importance, as it touches the national commitment to the use of nuclear energy both for power and for national security purposes.

The very concept of repair from radiation damage and of the possibility of cellular mechanisms of resistance thereto was very murky indeed until Dr. Witkin en-

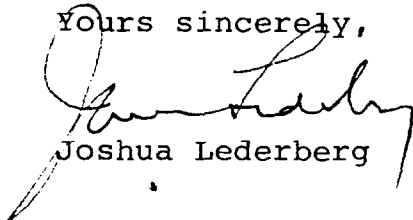
Dr. Jewel Plummer Cobb  
June 27, 1979

- 2 -

tered the field. Her work since 1946 has comprised an unremitting flow of contributions of meticulous technical merit, imagination and foresight. Her identification of detailed mechanisms of mutagenesis at a level of physiological and genetic analysis have opened the door to a much deeper understanding of mechanisms of mutation, and of the biochemistry of DNA repair, thereby engaging the specialized attention of a host of other investigators.

Her curriculum vitae already documents the very substantial appreciation which is sustained by her peers and colleagues in the field. A glance at the enclosed citation index to her name for a single year adds further qualitative and quantitative corroboration to my own unmeasured esteem. Quite apart from her research accomplishments, your institution is indeed fortunate to have a person of Dr. Witkin's academic dedication and human personal understanding on its faculty. As I said before, you could hardly have made a more singularly appropriate suggestion for the distinction you are contemplating.

Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg

Encl.

*See D. Witkin file*